



7 March 2017

The Hon. Dominic LeBlanc
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coastguard
15th flr, 200 Kent Street
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0E6

Dear Minister LeBlanc

Re: Central Coast Herring Decision

The BC Seafood Alliance is an umbrella organization whose members represent about 90 per cent of the wild seafood harvested on Canada's West Coast, worth some \$900 million in sales annually. Our member associations in turn represent all or the majority of licence holders in virtually every major fishery, making us by far the most representative commercial fishing organization in BC.

We are writing to express how deeply troubled Alliance members are by your recent decision to roll over the Central Coast allowable roe herring TAC of 215 tons, well below sustainable levels, and despite a considerable increase in the stocks acknowledged by peer reviewed DFO science. This decision is the result of negotiations and an agreement with the Heiltsuk, a process from which the fishing industry was excluded. It is a decision devoid of supporting science and inconsistent with recent legal rulings. It's a decision that's unacceptable to industry because it creates animosity among users and impairs respectful cooperation towards improved resource stewardship and shared utilization.

The historic and scientifically supported 20 per cent harvest rate based on the conservative DFO stock assessment model would have allowed for 5,164 tons; a 10 per cent harvest rate 1,626 tons. A 5,000 ton harvest would have provided an additional \$4-5 million dollars of direct wages to fishermen and shore worker as well as valuable secondary benefits to coastal communities and associated support industries and perhaps another \$8 million in exports.

More than the financial loss, however, is that the 215 tons was a political decision rather than one based on the science or the consultation that your government promised. Our members are concerned that the Central Coast roe herring decision gives short shrift to science, one of the founding principles of your government. We understand that Aboriginal TEK carried equal (or indeed more) weight than your own science. This potentially creates a free for all and devalues peer reviewed science which should be the foundation of all fishery decisions.

We understand that the government's Reconciliation agenda played a serious part in deciding on the 215 tons. While we support that agenda, it is completely unfair that commercial fishermen should

bear the cost of Reconciliation that more properly belongs to all Canadians. It also causes great fear that your government will sacrifice our industry—which already employs more Aboriginal people than virtually any other—out of political expediency. In the case of herring, for instance, more than a third of fishermen are Aboriginal as well as a significant proportion of the plant workers.

Furthermore, we were not included in the consultations or negotiations. Recent court decisions (the Supreme Court of Canada in *Lax Kw'alaams* and the trial judge's decision on intervenors in *Abousabt et al*) mean bilateral negotiations between Canada and First Nations without participation by affected industry do not meet the test of economic and regional fairness or reflect historical reliance on, and participation in, the fishery by non-aboriginals. This decision did not meet that test.

This fear tempers our support for your protected area agenda too. On the West Coast, several First Nations have openly said that marine protection is a means to increased access for them. Even a cursory glance at the First Nations' MaPP plans will confirm this with virtually every productive fishing ground in the Northern Shelf bioregion targeted for protection and creation of exclusive Aboriginal fisheries areas.

Additionally, the consideration given to the risk of protest on the water is again troubling. In effect, this means that a Nation or another group has only to threaten a protest against a legitimate fishery for it to remain closed or be unjustifiably constrained. A scary endorsement of bullying tactics.

We remind you also that your predecessor assured us that the 2016 decision was a “one-off,” writing to me that “Consistent with the commitments outlined in my mandate letter, our approach will be grounded in scientific evidence and the precautionary principle while providing sustainable harvest opportunities that advance our shared objectives related to economic prosperity.”

In our view your decision tosses aside science and evidence, consultation and collaboration, and economic prosperity while ignoring court requirements to include industry in bilateral negotiations with First Nations. It suggests that commercial fishermen and their families will alone bear the burden of Reconciliation. We greatly fear the precedent it sets for all fisheries on the West Coast.

We therefore seek a meeting of industry leaders with you in short order to discuss these fears and your government's intentions for commercial fisheries on the West Coast.

Yours sincerely,

BC SEAFOOD ALLIANCE



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cc. Catherine Blewett, Deputy Minister
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Terry Beech, MP, Parliamentary Secretary

BC Seafood Alliance Full members

Area B Seine Association
BC Tuna Fishermen's Association
Canadian Sablefish Association
Deep Sea Trawlers Association
Fisheries Council of Canada
Gulf Troll Association
Pacific Halibut Management Association
Pacific Prawn Fishermen's Association
Pacific Sea Cucumber Harvesters Association
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